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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000689

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SUBJECT: THREE DPP PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS DEBATE  
PRO-INDEPENDENCE THEMES

Classified By: AIT Acting Director Robert S. Wang,  
Reasons: 1.4 (b/c)

11. (C) Summary: During the first of three scheduled DPP presidential candidate debates, DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun on March 24 underscored his Deep Green positions, including eliminating the "four noes" commitment and promoting a new constitution. Most interest focused, however, on Yu's pointed attacks against Premier Su Tseng-chang for alleged wavering during the political crisis faced by President Chen late last year when First Lady Wu Shu-chen was indicted for corruption. Yu's attacks will probably be ineffective since President Chen has repeatedly denied the charges and expressed support for Premier Su, both before and after the debate. During the debate on Saturday, Su stressed the achievements of the DPP government, highlighting his success in changing "China" to "Taiwan" in the names of several government-controlled entities. Former Premier Frank Hsieh effectively fended off questions that implied he might be too moderate, citing his role in crafting key DPP documents and slogans and his record of support for constitutional change. Vice President Annette Lu sat out this debate because of past friction with the host organization, the pro-independence Taiwan Society. End Summary.

12. (C) Premier Su Tseng-chang, former Premier Frank Hsieh, and DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun, three of the four DPP presidential hopefuls, locked horns in a three-hour televised debate on Saturday, March 24 hosted by the pro-independence Taiwan Society. President Chen and Deep Green elder Koo Kwang-ming attended but did not speak at the event, which was formally titled "Report to the People of Taiwan." Vice President Annette Lu, the fourth DPP hopeful, declined to join the debate because of an incident last year in which the Taiwan Society, charging that Lu was "showing an ambition to usurp the presidency," announced publicly that she would not be welcome at a pro-Chen rally it was sponsoring.

Yu Attacks Su  
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13. (C) The debate Saturday focused heavily on Deep Green ideological themes, with panelists trying to elicit whether the candidates were firm in their convictions and in their loyalty to the DPP and President Chen. In addition to opening and closing statements, the three candidates

responded to two sets of questions from four panel members, one set on the candidates' records and the other on their future plans if elected president. In the period leading up to the event, Yu had argued that the debate should focus on the political "line" of the candidates, including whether they had stood resolutely by the party and President Chen late last year when First Lady Wu Shu-chen was indicted for corruption. During the debate, Yu underscored his support for Deep Green causes, such as establishing a new constitution and getting rid of the "four noes" commitment that President Chen first made to the U.S. in 2000. Yu also pointedly attacked Su, repeating charges, first levied by Vice President Lu, that during the political crisis late last year Su had pressured Chen by threatening to resign.

14. (C) Su refuted Yu's account of past events by reading a recent statement of President Chen supporting Su's version that his offer, not threat, to resign was made to help rather than hurt Chen. Yu did not let the matter drop, however, using his closing statement to accuse Su of making overtures to the KMT opposition in preparation for a possible resignation by President Chen. Yu offered to visit a temple to swear to the truth of what he was saying. Su did not have an opportunity to respond to Yu's final attacks but criticized Yu strongly in comments to the media immediately afterward. Subsequently, President Chen again came out in defense of Su against Yu's charges.

#### Su/Hsieh Defend Themselves Against Charges of Moderation

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15. (C) The debate provided both Su and Hsieh the opportunity to defend themselves against recent charges of possible wavering on pro-independence issues. Su repeated established

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DPP positions and reviewed the accomplishments of the DPP government, stressing that his approach was to "do more and say less." He cited his recent moves to rectify the names of several entities, including dropping "Chiang Kai-shek" from the name of the Taoyuan International Airport and issuing the first postage stamps under the name Taiwan rather than Republic of China. According to Su, the government's success in carrying out such name rectifications was because care was taken to prevent leaks ahead of time and the changes were carried out very quickly.

16. (C) Asked about his references to the "one China constitution of the ROC" and whether he was too "centrist," Hsieh pulled out an old news article, which showed that as Premier he had proposed publicly in the Legislative Yuan (LY) that the one China provision should be removed from the constitution. Hsieh also noted his role in drafting the party's charter, in devising key party slogans including "Taiwan first," and in launching the campaign to join the UN. Questioned about his calls for harmony and coexistence, Hsieh stressed the need for ethnic harmony among all people working for Taiwan's interests but added that the PRC military threat against Taiwan precluded harmonious coexistence with China at this point.

#### "Four Noes" and Constitutional Change

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17. (C) Calling President Chen's "four noes" commitment to the U.S. a failure, Yu argued that the right of Taiwan's people to determine their future cannot be restricted in any way. Su said he would withstand outside pressure, refrain from making any promises, and do nothing to compromise Taiwan's independent and sovereign status. While saying he would not promise the U.S. anything because the results of democracy are beyond anybody's control, Hsieh also stressed the importance of maintaining good communications and mutual trust with the U.S. On the constitution, Yu argued that Taiwan could use a referendum to establish a new constitution, bypassing current legal procedures that require

LY approval of proposed constitutional changes. Hsieh refuted Yu's idea, arguing that it is not provided for in the current constitution, there is no way to organize such a referendum, and other governments would not accept the results.

18. (C) The DPP will hold two presidential debates in middle and late April, with all four DPP candidates planning to participate. Following these debates, the DPP has scheduled a two-part presidential primary process: a May 6 vote by party members (weighted 30 percent) and May 7-28 public opinion polls (weighted 70 percent), the combined results being used to determine the presidential candidate. However, if President Chen succeeds in his efforts to mediate an agreement among the four candidates on who should represent the party against the KMT (despite some public indications that he was giving up such efforts), then there would be no need to complete the full presidential primary process.

Comment

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19. (C) Stuck at the bottom in polling, Yu presumably was hoping to undermine frontrunner Su Tseng-chang to try to improve his own standing in the candidate pecking order. Yu's strategy may well have backfired, however. President Chen, who blames Yu for blocking his efforts to mediate among the four DPP hopefuls, has gone out of his way both to defend Su against the charges of Yu and Vice President Lu and to endorse his Premier's performance by stating publicly that Su is "doing a very good job, better and better." In the debate, Hsieh may have done the best job in presenting his ideas and defending himself against charges of excessive moderation. Hsieh also benefited from not being the target of Yu's attacks. President Chen's repudiation of Yu would appear to make Yu the clear loser in this debate. While Su's performance was credible and sincere, he lacks Hsieh's polished debating skills. By attending the debate from beginning to end, President Chen clearly showed his intention to continue playing a major role in the DPP candidate

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selection process.

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